



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Men Against Violence Against Women

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Dr. Russell Foote, CHAIRMAN. Donald Berment, SECRETARY. Desmond Persad, TREASURER.

Date: Fri/27/June/08

Our Ref.: mavaw-GT

Your Ref:

TO ALL CONCERNED

Gender Training Must Not Only Be Done But It Must Be Seen To Be Done!

In the event that the following COMMENTS may be considered without the balanced “Gender Lens” so necessary in order to achieve a “Culture of Peace”, let me first extend my gratitude, deep appreciation and compliments to the UNFPA and the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, for an excellent attempt to continue the understanding of “Gender and Development,” with their joint 2-day Training Workshop titled, “Gender And Sexual And Reproductive Health And Rights,” at the Crowne Plaza Hotel on the 11th and 12th of June 2008.

In my view, a genuine attempt was made to place the role of and concerns of men fully alongside the role of and concerns of women, within the context of sexual and reproductive health, to the extent that each participant was given a beautiful Manual, CD and Certificate of participation, at the end of the Training, all 49 women and 9 men.

My FIRST COMMENT, lies in a sentence which we are familiar with and which sets the tone for development in all areas of life i.e. “Justice Must Not Only Be Done But It Must Be Seen To Be Done”

Everyone acknowledged the absence of men at this Training Workshop, there being 9 men and 49 women and us MAAW men also noted the absence of a male presenter in the sessions dealing with “Men’s Role in Reproductive Health” and “Gender, Violence and Human Rights”. The latter made more poignant, as we are fully aware of a Male Support Unit within the Ministry, with members who host Radio Programmes and conduct training and we assume that the UNFPA have male members of staff capable of presenting. So you will forgive me when I repeat here the subject head of this correspondence, Gender Training Must Not Only Be Done But It Must Be Seen To Be Done!

The three Directors of MAAW who were present, had been very vocal during some of the sessions and a measure of discomfort was noticed, when some comments articulated past experiences of contributory elements to Gender Based Violence, to the point where the closing commentator, Ms. Monica Williams remarked and I quote, “MAAW started off as being against violence against women and now they seem to be changing direction,” unquote.

To set the record straight, a CD is available which explains the Concept, Philosophy and Direction of “Men Against Violence Against Women” (MAAW), since its inception in 1994 and said CD is supplied free of charge on request.

We have categorically stated that our men are not only concerned with the violence against women by men, but also the violence to women perpetrated by women and the latent potential catalyst for violent behaviour, intimately and most times subtly, inherent in policies, practices and procedures which contribute to the initiation of violence against women, the latter existing at all levels and in all social groupings and can be classified as Gender Based Violence.

In other words, **MAVAW** men have been pioneering the concept of Gender Based Violence over the last 14 years, since 1994, totally focused on action-based projects on our own and in support of other NGO's, methodologies targeting behaviour change, outreach activities via the media and at conferences, desktop published material and sharing the textbook knowledge of our members who are publishing their work.

Additionally, **MAVAW** men have followed a holistic approach to understanding "Violence Against Women", in that we analyze violent behaviour at 3 levels, MACRO, MEZZO and MICRO and position this analysis at the MACRO Level, within a Syndrome we title "The BSD Syndrome".

At the MACRO Level, all direct physical, emotional, financial violence is considered.

At the MEZZO Level all latent potential catalysts for violent behaviour towards women, inherent in policies, practices and procedures are considered.

At the MICRO Level, all the pain and suffering experienced by the loved ones of the women being violated is considered i.e. the feelings of sons, fathers, grandfathers, uncles, daughters, mothers, grandmothers, aunts etc., even the acceptance that within the body of the women is the biological contribution of both her mother and father.

So that when Gender Training is planned and the Organisers are unable or unwilling to put men at Presenter level, they are contributing to the violent thought that men are incapable or unwilling to accept their role and responsibility to contribute to the process of finding solutions to Violence Against Women, bearing in mind that GENDER is analyzed in relation to both men and women and such behaviour may be considered Gender Based Violence.

When said Organisers invite NGO and State bodies with male and female members and do not suggest or state that of the 2 invitees, one must be a male they are also continuing a practice, which excludes/denies men a participatory role in change and I am reliably informed that recent research is pointing to this practice of deliberate male disenfranchisement as a contributory factor in male underachievement and minority presence at learning institutions.

To finish my FIRST COMMENT, we of **MAVAW** hope that the research mentioned in the paragraph immediately above, continues to the extent that all receiving application operations, staffed solely by women are monitored closely to avoid the suspicion that Gender Based Violence against men is being practiced.

MAVAW sat on 2 (two) of the most important Cabinet appointed committees in the recent past. The first one was for The Reform of the Domestic Violence Act, 1991 and Related Legislation from January 1997 to June 1997 and on which there were 5 men and 13 women. The second one was the Multi-disciplinary Committee to Examine the Status of the Family in Trinidad and Tobago from July 2003 to August 2004 and on which there was 7 men and 11 women and from these two experiences comes my SECOND COMMENT, which example Gender Based Violence at the MEZZO Level.

In the June 1997 Report of the Reform of the Domestic Violence Act 1991, signed by the Committee, we agreed that a Protection Order was to be extended from the present time of 1 year to a period of 2 years and a person can be excluded from a home from the present time of 3 months to a period of 1 year.

The men were also united in their caution to Minister Kamla Persad Bissessar, the Chair of the Committee, that a prominent media campaign must precede the introduction of these changes and adequate personnel must be added to the Probation Department and the National Family Services to provide for any fallout of these new measures and any hardships, which may accrue.

To our surprise, the law brought to Parliament provided for a 3 year Protection Order, which we could have lived with and the possibility of a 3 year exclusion from the home by an offending party, which the men were very dismayed about primarily because not 1 (one) media advisory was made or additional personnel hired to buffer the harsh consequences of action the Court was now capable off. Our history recorded some of the most horrific family fatalities in the next three years following the introduction of this Act and in my view, this a perfect example of how Gender Based Violence can be committed to women by women at the MEZZO level.

In the August 2004 Report of the Multi-disciplinary Committee to Examine the Status of the Family in Trinidad and Tobago, we submitted 52 recommendations to Minister Mustapha Abdul Hamid, some of which were to be done immediately. To our surprise the Minister brought 10 recommendations of his own for us to sign, telling us that those 52 recommendations we made were too much for the Cabinet to read. No one signed them, but his recommendations were taken to Cabinet anyway. Today six (6) years hence we are seeing signs of what neglect to follow scientifically researched solutions achieves and the Minister's behaviour is another perfect example of how Gender Based Violence can be committed by men towards women at the MEZZO level.

To finish my SECOND COMMENT, we of **MAVAW** caution all those committed to achieve a "Culture of Peace" in our beloved Trinidad and Tobago, to be conscious of the fact that there are men and women who require additional help to deal with their personal issues and will innocently or intentionally delay the solutions for behaviour change if they are not properly monitored. Unfortunately, some of these men and women are at very important decision making levels in our society and those decisions affect many citizens, a large number not having a clue as to where is the source of their pain and suffering.

My THIRD COMMENT is peripheral to the belief of some women that they are best equipped to direct how men must talk to men. We have heard of and know of many women who are bringing up their sons without help from the child's father or positive male influence and with the feeling that they can role model to their sons how to be a man. This misconception must be addressed at the individual family, community and national levels.

Women can bring up sons, they cannot bring up men. Similarly men can bring up daughters, they cannot bring up women and this fact has to be accepted if we are to stop the examples of Gender Based Violence, which emanates from that belief and a few examples are given below: -

Recently **MAVAW** started a radio programme with 103 FM, titled "Family Values", which is aired every Wednesday from 10am to 11am in their Studio, on Level 4 of the Long Circular Mall and which was to run for 13 weeks, with the option to renew for another 13 weeks. This station has an audience of 200,000 persons and spans all strata of society, which is an excellent opportunity to assist the nation with Family Development and the achievement of a "Culture of Peace".

Because **MAVAW** is not funded by any state or private corporation we are always strapped for the necessary cash to maximize these fantastic opportunities. We however wrote the Ministry of Social Development on the 16th April 2008 and requested a small sum of TT\$ 6,325.00 to provide Books and CD's to distribute to listeners. To date we have completed 10 programmes and the Ministry is still considering our request, a Ministry that returns hundreds of thousands of dollars, budgeted for, but not used for social development yearly and a Ministry with 95% of the top Managers being female. In addition the two books we are planning to distribute have been self published by two of our members who are qualified, well respected professionals. Dr. Robert Moultrie is a medical doctor who trained for 8 years in the USA and Dr. Kenneth Niles is a lecturer at our University of the West

Indies. “The Power and Influence of the Parent Child Relationship” by Dr. Moultrie and “Stepping Out—Man to Man” by Dr. Niles were analyzed by a female psychologist at the department of the Ministry called National Family Services, which is 98% female dominated and she found that those books by men reaching out to other men were not suitable for distribution, so she will not recommend that we get the funds to purchase them.

These books are in our bookshops including the UWI Bookshop and here is a woman telling men, not only what to say to men but when, how and where to say it. In my view, this is Gender Based Violence at the most destructive level, where it prevents positive male role models from reaching out to other men, using our taxpayer’s money to do it.

How long has this kind of thing been happening and what has been the influence of this kind of behaviour on our young men and women in society? This is another area for Gender Bias Research, to be done, in my view.

Another example of this kind of behaviour occurred on 12th July 2007 when MAVAW was doing a Radio Programme with 91.1FM of the CNMG group, titled “*Inside the Male Mind—women can’t hear what men do’h say*”. The topic for the day was “*Men Working With Executive Women*” and Mr. Kerwin Eaige of the Male Support Unit of the Ministry of Community, Culture and Gender Affairs was in the Studio with us. When we asked Kerwin to comment on the Topic, he informed us that he did not get permission from his female boss to talk on the programme. This is a man employed to help other men from a Male Support Unit in the Ministry, paid by the taxpayer, but cannot talk about issues that affect men in the workplace and on a Programme exposing the thoughts, feelings and beliefs of men for analysis, sharing, research and future training programmes.

My final COMMENT notes that for some time now male and female voices have been raised on the vexing absence of male teachers in our primary school system and father absenteeism. We have a Young Men’s Christian Association and a woman is the head. We have Young Women’s Christian Association and no men are at Board Level. MAVAW was a participant in a 3 day Train the Trainers Programme for Fathers held by “The Institute for Promoting Responsible Fathers” at the St Augustine Regional Complex on the 7th, 8th and 14th of June 2008.

On 2 occasions representatives from the Ministry of Social Development attended to assess the programme, since they approved the funds for it and on both days, female staff members attended. Does this Ministry have any men who can have a say in men’s work?

Last month was declared by the United Nations as the International Month of the Family with a focus on Responsible Fatherhood. Are the men in senior positions in society aware that the absence of men in the workplace could be a direct consequence of female bias and Gender Based Violence towards men; ultimately affecting the same women in society we are all trying to protect?

We sincerely hope that that these comments are taken in the same vein of thought that they are given. Men Against Violence Against Women (MAVAW) is committed to creating a “*Culture of Peace*” and if placing some painful facts on the table assist this goal, full speed ahead.

To all our friends and members, we are embarking on a subscription/donation drive in order to start training programmes soon. Our Bank is RBTT Bank Limited, 55 Independence Square, Port of Spain, Trinidad W.I., Swift No. for Wire Transfers is RBTTTPX, Account Number is 8811041956, Customer name is Men Against Violence Against Women and we have Charitable Body Status.

Signed *Donald Berment, Secretary.*

Company No M 1799(95) Charitable Status No F (BUD):7/4/205

RBTT Account No. 8811041956.